A

DISCOURSE

Concerning a

Death-bed Repentance.

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Duke of *ORMOND*.

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TO THE

KING's

MOST

Excellent MAJESTY.

May it please Your Majesty,

TO accept of this Treatise, part of which was preached in Your Royal Chappel before the late Queen, Your Majesty's Dearest Consort of blessed Memory. That I did not then Present it to the Hands of that Excellent Princess, was the Imperfe-

ction of the Work, (I having designed some further enlargement upon that Subject) otherwise I should most chearfully have complied with some approving Intimation then given, in order to a Command for the Publishing of it. The whole being now finished, is most humbly submitted to Your Majesty's Censure, by

Your MAJESTY's

Most humble and Obedient

Subject and Servant,

William Assheton.

The

THE PREFACE.

HAVING *made my self a Debtor to the Publick, for* A Plain Method of Devotion for Sick and Dying Persons: *And one chief part of that Devotion being the Exercise of a true Repentance, (for the Minister who visits the Sick Person, is directed by the Church of* England *to examine*, Whether he repent him truly of his Sins?) *lest Men should from hence be encouraged to defer their Repentance to a Sick and Dying Bed, (as if they might safely enjoy their Sins in their Health, because they are admonished to Re-*

pent when they come to Dye.) I have therefore very faithfully examined that matter: And have endeavoured in the following Treatise to convince them, That though Repentance, as all other Graces, must be exercised and improved upon the approach of Death (for our Lamps must be trimmed when the Bridegroom comes) yet A Death-bed Repentance is neither comfortable nor safe.

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Advertis-

A DISCOURSE Concerning a Death-bed Repentance.

'TIS the faint Dictate even of Natural Reason, but the more clear and full Discovery of Revelation, That when we dye, when our Souls shall be separated from our Bodies, when we leave this World, we shall not then perish like the Brutes, and cease to be; but shall subsist and continue in another State and Capacity, either of Happiness or Misery, to all Eternity. And we are further instructed from Divine Revelation in

the Holy Scriptures, That this preſent Life, this ſhort and uncertain time of continuance in this World, is the only ſpace of Probation and Trial, to fit and prepare us for our future Eternal State. *As the Tree falls, ſo it lies.* There is no Work nor Repentance in the Grave. But as Death ſhall ſeize us, in the ſame Capacity we ſhall appear before the Throne of God, and ſhall then be diſpoſed of in an irreverſible unalterable State, either of Happineſs or Miſery.

Thoſe who make their own Will their Law, and who are guided and acted by their own vicious ſenſual Inclinations, they ſhall be eternally miſerable. Or according to our blunt way of expreſſing it in our *Engliſh* Language, They ſhall be *Damned*, that is, they ſhall be condemned to that ſtate of Miſery, which the Juſtice of God hath prepared to be the ſad Lot and Portion of all impenitent Sinners.

But on the other hand; Thoſe who follow the Divine Conduct, and are obedient

obedient to the Laws of the Gospel; such Persons, through the Mercy of God, and the Merits of Jesus Christ, shall be saved and preserved from the Wrath to come. And shall be placed in that happy State and Capacity, where they shall not only be freed from Misery, but shall further be secured in the unalterable enjoyment of an unexpressible Happiness and Satisfaction.

From these Considerations you are fully convinced, that it is both your Interest and Duty to take care of your Souls, and provide for Eternity. But the sad mistake is this, (and it is the ruin of thousands) you fancy it is time enough hereafter to entertain such Thoughts. 'You have so much 'Diversion and Employment in the 'World, that you have little or no 'time for the Duties of Religion. But 'when you have settled your Affairs, 'and dispatched *this* or *that*: When 'you have improved or cleared your 'Estates: When you have taken in 'this Mortgage, finished that Pur-

'chaſe, *&c.* When the hurry of theſe 'things is over, and that you can call 'your Thoughts your own, *then* you 'promiſe your ſelves to be very Reli-'gious; that is, when you have done 'with this World, you will provide 'for the next. When your Bodies be-'gin to be crazy, and your ſtrength 'to decay; When you are laid upon 'a Sick-bed, and have loſt the reliſh 'of ſenſual Pleaſures, then you fancy 'you ſhall have both leiſure and in-'clination to repent of your Sins, 'and to beg Pardon for them. And 'whenever you do Repent, (tho' it 'be but upon your Death-bed) God, 'who is very merciful, hath promi-'ſed to accept you.

I appeal now to your own Conſci-ences if this is not the very Language of your hearts: But know, that your hearts are deceitful, and take heed leſt they be further hardned through the deceitfulneſs of Sin.

That I may therefore awaken your Conſideration, and convince you of your danger in truſting to a broken Reed:

Reed: That I may make you ſenſible how unſafe it is to depend upon a *Death-bed Repentance*, I ſhall very diſtinctly examine that matter. By ſhewing,

1. *What is meant by true Repentance?*
2. I ſhall enquire, *How far, and in what manner a Sick and Dying Sinner can be able to Repent?*
3. I ſhall deſire ſuch Perſons ſadly to conſider, *What ſmall hope there is, that ſuch kind of Repentance ſhould find acceptance with God.*
4. I ſhall examine thoſe *Two* noted Scripture-inſtances commonly mentioned in favour of a Death-bed Repentance, *viz. The Labourers in the Vineyard, who came in at the eleventh hour.* And, *The Thief upon the Croſs.*

But as Preparatory to my enlargement on theſe Particulars, whereby it will be more diſtinct and inſtructive; I muſt *firſt* premiſe, what is meant by a Death-bed Repentance.

Now

Now a Death-bed Repentance denotes *Two* things.

1. A finiſhing that great Work of Repentance which we begun in our Healths, and took ſome care to carry on amidſt the Buſineſs and Diverſions of this World; But do now more ſolemnly compleat at our Deaths, by reviewing the State of our Souls, and perfecting our Accounts with God.

This kind of Death-bed Repentance is ſo far from being a miſtake, that it is a neceſſary Duty, and is the commendable practice of good and pious Men. But,

2. There is a Vulgar Notion of a Death-bed Repentance, *viz.*

'When a Man then begins to Repent when he comes to dye. When 'a Man hath ſpent all his Life in the 'gratifying of his Luſts, and hath followed his own vicious Inclinations. 'When he hath denied himſelf no 'carnal Satisfactions, but hath taken 'his fill of ſenſual Pleaſures: And yet 'ſuch a Man, when his Body is diſa-'bled, and Death approacheth, ſo that

'that he hath neither time nor incli-
'nation to Sin any longer, will pretend
'to be ſorry for his Sin, and Repent.
This we call a Death-bed Repentance.

Now how *unſafe* and *uncomfortable* ſuch a Death-bed Repentance is, I ſhall endeavour to convince you, by examining the formentioned Particulars.

I. *What is meant by true Repentance.*

The vulgar and common Notion of Repentance, is evidently this:

When a Man hath committed a fault, and hath done ſomething amiſs, and is then ſorry for it; is grieved and troubled that he hath done it, and doth heartily wiſh it had not been done. Such a Man, we uſually ſay, doth Repent of ſuch an Action.

But this is not the full adequate Notion of a Goſpel-Repentance; of ſuch a Repentance as ſhall find acceptance with God.

This is but the Repentance of Malefactors at the Gallows; nay, it is no other than the Repentance of *Cain* and *Judas*.

It

It is obſerved, That the moſt profligate condemned Wretch when he comes to dye, will be very ſorry for what he hath done. He will be much aſhamed, and will have great Indignation againſt himſelf, to think he ſhould be ſuch a fool to part with his precious Life, and all the Comforts and Satisfactions of this World, in ſuch a vile ignominious manner, to be tied up like a Dog, perhaps for the taking of a few Sheep. How will ſuch a Fellow fawn upon, and flatter the Judge, *That if he will but ſpare him, O what an honeſt Man he will then be!* And yet do but procure his Pardon, and let him looſe, and he is quickly at the old Trade. Nay, 'tis great odds but you have him again by the next Aſſizes.

Now will any one pretend that in ſuch a Caſe as this, there is true Repentance?

Which yet is more evident from thoſe Scripture-Inſtances of *Cain* and *Judas*.

It ſeems very probable, from the circumſtances of his Story, that *Cain* did repent

repent of the Murther of his Brother. *My punishment*, saith he, *is greater than I can bear*, Gen. 4. 13. But because in the Judgment of some Learned Men, this is rather an instance of Despair than Repenting-Sorrow; I shall not much insist upon this of *Cain*. But as to the other instance of *Judas*, 'tis express and undeniable.

You read his Story, Matth. 27. 3, 4, 5. *Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was comdemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief Priests and Elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent Blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

Here are as signal Instances that *Judas* did sincerely repent of what he had done, as can possibly be given. For besides the express Testimony of the Holy Ghost, which in plain terms tells us he did Repent, and that he himself declared, *He had sinned in betraying the innocent*

innocent Blood: He further gives this evidence, that he was in earneſt, he not only reſtores the *thirty* pieces, but in horror and conſternation of Mind, *he went and hanged himſelf.*

Here is, I ſay, in this inſtance as much Grief, and Trouble, and Vexation for the Commiſſion of a Sin, and as noted evidence that he was heartily ſorry for it, as can poſſibly be ſuppoſed. And yet 'tis as plain, that this Repentance of *Judas* was not an Evangelical Repentance, ſuch a Repentance as was accepted by Almighty God. Our Bleſſed Saviour, who is Truth it ſelf, having paſſed this Decree upon him: *Wo unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed: it had been good for that man, if he had not been born,* Matth. 26. 24.

It appears from theſe premiſes, that there is more required to a ſaving Goſpel-Repentance than trouble of Mind. *When a Man hath committed a fault, he may be ſorry for it, he may grieve and mourn that he hath done it; he may heartily wiſh it had not been done; he may make*

make Reſtitution of his ill-gotten Goods. All this may be done; thus far he may proceed, and yet his Repentance is but imperfect, and ſhall never find acceptance with a pure and holy God.

But here you will ſay;

If Men may proceed thus far, and yet their Repentance is not true and ſaving; How ſhall we know that we have true Repentance; and wherein doth the nature of it conſiſt?

To this I anſwer,

God only can inſtruct us what is true Repentance. That is, it is very agreeable to the Majeſty and Sovereignty of God to preſcribe the Terms and Conditions of Salvation, and to appoint his Creatures what they muſt do; how they muſt behave themſelves to be accepted by him.

Now there is no other way to be informed in this matter, but to conſult the Holy Scriptures. In thoſe Sacred Writings, the Divine Wiſdom hath ſufficiently revealed his Will, and hath plainly told us, *What it is that he required of us*; and *what we are*

to

to do, that we may inherit Eternal Life.

We are expreſly admoniſhed, *That without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord,* Heb. 12. 14. *That the unrighteous ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God,* 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10. *If ye live after the fleſh, ye ſhall die: but if ye through the ſpirit do mortify the deeds of the Body, ye ſhall live,* Rom. 8. 13. *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap. For he that ſoweth to his fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption: but he that ſoweth to the ſpirit, ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting,* Gal. 6. 7, 8. *For the Son of man ſhall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he ſhall reward every man according to his works,* Matth. 16. 27. *And* the Son of God *being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal ſalvation unto all them that obey him,* Heb. 5. 9. And St. *Paul* doth plainly admoniſh

us,

us, That *the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 2 Thes. 1. 7, 8.

From these places of Scripture (to omit many others) it evidently appears, *That actual Holiness, and actual Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel is the indispensible Condition of Salvation.* And consequently to be only Sorry for our Sins; to be troubled that we have done amiss; unless this Sorrow do bring forth fruits meet for Repentance; that is, unless it be attended with actual Reformation and Amendment, it is not a true and Evangelical Repentance, such a Repentance as God hath promised to accept.

2. I am to examine, *How far, and in what manner a Sick and Dying Sinner can be able to Repent?*

And this I shall best perform by a plain representation of matter of Fact. Whilst I faithfully remind you, how,

or

or in what manner you may happen to dye.

1. *You may dye ſuddenly.*

This hath been many a Man's caſe, and you have no aſſurance to the contrary, but it may be yours. If ſome hidden Diſtemper do not thus extinguiſh the Lamp of Life, your own Sin and Folly may then puff it out. You may happen in ſome private Quarrel, unexpectedly to dye at the point of a Sword, and ſo may fall a Sacrifice to your Luſt, to your Malice, or Revenge. But whatever may occaſion your Death; if it be ſudden, it is then impoſſible for you to Repent upon your Death-beds. And if you have not taken care in your life-time to perform that great Work, then according to the Laws of the Goſpel, you are utterly loſt and undone for ever. *For except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh.*

2. *You may dye raving Mad, or ſtupidly Senſleſs.*

There is a ſufficient Maſs of vicious corrupted Humours, or (as Phyſicians phraſe

phraſe it) of Morbifick Matter in any of your Bodies, as may occaſion theſe ſad Symptoms and diſmal Effects. And if this be your caſe, where then is your Death-bed Repentance?

It is neceſſary to Repentance (even in the vulgar Notion of it) that you ſhould not only remember your Sins, but ſhould alſo be ſorry for them. But now ſuppoſing your Diſtemper is either a *Frenzy* or a *Lethargy*, or in any other inſtance of ſuch a nature, as ſhall wholly deprive you of your Memory and Underſtanding, your Repentance is then impoſſible. But,

3. Suppoſing it is neither *thus* nor *thus* with you; but that God in his Mercy gives you a ſlow and eaſy paſſage out of this World. Suppoſe your Diſtemper is ſo gentle, that it neither diſtracts you with Pain, nor diſorders your Faculties; but that, as we phraſe it, *You have your Senſes to the laſt*. In ſuch a caſe as this (which is the moſt favourable that can be ſuppoſed) I will now examine, how far any Man who hath ſpent the time of his

his Health in Sin and Vanity, can be able to Repent.

1. *Wicked men, when they come to die, may remember their Sins, which they ſeldom think on in the time of their Healths.*

The generality of men are ſo wholly taken up with the Deſigns of This World, that they have neither leiſure nor inclination to think of the Next. In what a hurry ſuch men do ſpend the Day, is very obvious to obſerve; and at Night, being loaden with Wine and Buſineſs, they ſleep over their Cares and their Sins together.

But when ſome lingring Diſeaſe ſhall confine them to their Chambers, or nail them to their Beds; when their Sleep is departed from them, and that they lie rowling and tumbling, and wiſhing for the Day: Then they are at leiſure to conſider their Ways, and to remember what they have done, and to recollect the former Paſſages of their Lives.

2. *Wicked men, when they come to die, may not only remember, but alſo may be very ſorry, and much troubled for their Sins;*

Sins; *and may likewiſe make a penitent Confeſſion of them.*

This evidently appears from the former Inſtance of *Judas*, who was not a little troubled for betraying his Maſter; and as freely makes confeſſion of his Fault: *I have ſinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent Blood.*

And this is undeniable even from daily obſervation: Thoſe who viſit Sick-Beds, and hear the dying Groans of departing Sinners, are beſt able to tell you how they will lament their former Lives, and what wretched Sinners they have been. And at ſuch a time they will be very free and ingenuous in their Confeſſion, with *a thus*, and *thus* have I done; and withal they may mightily judge and condemn themſelves for it.

If ever you have been laid upon a Sick-Bed, with the Terrors and Apprehenſions of another World before you, then I appeal to your own experience for the truth of what I have now ſaid.

3. *Wicked*

3. *Wicked men, upon their Death-Beds, may not only make a ſorrowful Confeſſion of their Sins, but alſo they may earneſtly beg Pardon for them.*

There is a Principle of Self-preſervation in the moſt vicious carnal man, which prompts him to be ſolicitous for deliverance from an imminent Danger. A noted Inſtance of this you have in Seamen; ſuch men (eſpecially the common Sailers) are not uſually over-zealous in Religion, and yet in a dangerous Storm, or in a leaky ſinking Ship, thoſe who ſeldom named God, unleſs in Oaths and Execrations, will now fall to their Prayers.

And thus the moſt graceleſs, ſenſual, worldly Perſon, when he comes to die, and hath the proſpect of another World immediately before him; when he ſees the Infernal Pit open to receive him, O with what earneſtneſs will he deprecate the Divine Vengeance! How paſſionately will he pray unto God to ſpare him, to be gracious to him, to pardon and forgive him!

Nay,

Nay, even those who have been so careless and unconcerned, that they could never in their whole life-time be persuaded to remember our Blessed Saviour's Passion in the way of his own Institution in the Holy Sacrament; yet these very Persons on their Death-bed will pretend to remember it. They will then plead his Merits and Satisfaction, and will beg God's Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ.

This likewise, as to matter of Fact, is undeniably evident.

4. *Wicked Men, when they come to dye, may further make very serious Resolutions of amendment of Life.* And in such cases this is the noted Language of a Death-bed.

'O what a wicked Wretch have I 'been? I have done *thus* and *thus*. But 'if God will now please to spare my 'Life, and restore me to my Health, 'I'll become a new Man. I'll no more 'be guilty of such Intemperance. I'll 'be wanton and lascivious no more. 'I'll take heed of lying and slandering. 'And I'll refrain from this cursing and

'swearing. I'll be more careful to sanctify the Sabbath. I'll not only frequent the Church, but for the future I'll no more be guilty of vain Sports and Pastimes on the Lord's-day. And on the Week-day, tho' I must follow my worldly Business, yet I'll do it in dependance upon God's Providence, I will never more neglect to pray unto God; but do now resolve Morning and Evening to bend my Knees to my Creator and Redeemer.

Lastly, As an evidence that he is sincere, *He may make Restitution and Satisfaction in several instances.*

He may declare that he bears no Malice, but doth freely forgive all the World. He may likewise restore his ill-gotten Goods; and may give satisfaction to those he remembers to have wronged.

And not only so, but for the close of all, he may be large in his Charity in Reversion; and by his last Will and Testament may bequeath a bountiful Legacy to the Poor.

All

All this may be done, and it is the utmoſt that can be done upon a Death-bed.

3. Let us now impartially examine, *Whether all this will amount to true Repentance?* Such a Repentance as ſhall find acceptance with a Pure and Holy God.

1. *Wicked Men when they come to Dye may remember their Sins.*

But ſuch remembrance being no other than the exerciſe of a natural Faculty, is neither Repentance, nor any part of that Saving-work. The vileſt Wretches do but too much remember their Sins, and pleaſe themſelves in that Carnal Satisfaction they had in the enjoyment of them.

But, you will ſay, this is not the Caſe. For ſuch a dying Sinner doth not barely remember his Sins, but he remembers them with Shame and Sorrow, and is much troubled for the committing of them. *And this Trouble, and Sorrow, and Compunction of Mind, we hope will be accepted as true Repentance.*

To this I anſwer.

Such a dying Sinner is indeed very much troubled, and is under great anguiſh and perplexity of Mind. But let us now ſtrictly examine what's the occaſion of all this Conſternation? Is he ſorry that he hath offended God, that he hath tranſgreſſed the Laws of ſo gracious a Majeſty? This pretence is not probable, when we reflect upon his former Converſation. He who made his own Will his Law, and never denied himſelf in any Carnal Enjoyment; but tho' God himſelf in his holy World hath expreſly delared, That *ſuch* and *ſuch* things ought not to be done; yet becauſe of ſome preſent Pleaſure and Profit he is reſolved to commit them. He who was not only pleaſed with his Sin, but gloried in his Sin, and boaſted in his Sin; 'tis very unaccountable, that ſuch a Man all on the ſudden ſhould be thus ſorry for his Sin. 'Tis ſtrange that his Judgment and Appehenſion of things ſhould be thus changed in a moment.

For

For his Conviction, I'll ſuppoſe him to be reſtored to his former Health and Vigour, and that the former Paſſages of his Life, in any inſtance, could be repeated. Being under ſuch pleaſing Circumſtances, can he then honeſtly and conſcientiouſly make this Expoſtulation of *Joſeph*, *How can I do this great wickedneſs, and ſin againſt God?*

'Tis true, the Man is now troubled; but for what? 'Tis not for his Sin, (which he never had any Quarrel againſt) but in plain terms, it is for the puniſhment of his Sin.

He is indeed thus far troubled for his Sin. He is very much out of Humour that he can Sin no longer; that he hath loſt his reliſh and inclination to it. It makes him heavy and lumpiſh, that all his pleaſant Days are paſs'd and gone; and that nothing now remains but a ſad Reckoning and Account. *Rejoyce, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart chear thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all theſe things God*

will bring thee into judgment. 'Tis this *Judgment*, this Reckoning and Account that makes him quake and tremble.

When a poor dying Wretch, who hath neglected God and his Duty all his life long, shall be now convinced by the decays of Nature, that his Soul must immediately be torn from his Body: When he looks upward, and there beholds a just Judge ready to pronounce a sad Sentence upon him: When he casts his Eye downward, and there observes that place of Horror, that flaming Furnace just ready to receive him: When he now sees and considers these things, which formerly in the days of his Vanity he had no leisure to think on; and further reflects, that all this Misery is now brought upon him by his own folly, and that with a very little care and forecast it might have been prevented. Being under such sad Circumstances as these, 'tis but a natural Love of a Man's self; 'tis no other than an instance of Self-preservation to be troubled

bled and perplexed. In plain terms, This anguish of Mind for the Happiness that is lost, and the Torments that shall be endured, is the very Worm of the Damned that dieth not. And if such Sorrow and Vexation as this is true Repentance, then those miserable Creatures shall sadly repent to all Eternity. But,

2. *The dying Person is not only sorry for his Sin, but also makes Confession of it, and very humbly begs Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ. And will not this be accepted as true Repentance?*

I answer.

We are indeed assured by St. *John*, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*, 1 John 1. 9. But what kind of Confession shall be accepted, the Holy Scriptures must inform us.

In these Sacred Writings we are often admonished, that it is not an *Historical Confession*; 'tis not a bare-acknowledgment that we have done *thus* or *thus*; but it is a Penitential Confession shall find acceptance. *Who-*

ſo confeſſeth and forſaketh his ſin ſhall find mercy, Prov. 28. 13. A ſick dying Man may indeed confeſs his Sins; but how far he can be able to forſake his Sin, that is, to amend and reform, ſhall be conſidered in its proper place.

But you will ſay, *He not only confeſſeth, but he begs pardon for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt*; and we have a gracious promiſe that at ſuch a time we ſhall be heard, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou ſhalt glorify me*, Pſalm 50. 15. And our Bleſſed Saviour hath aſſured us, *Whatſoever ye ſhall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*, John 16. 23. Now here is a poor languiſhing Creature in great diſtreſs and trouble, and will not God accept him for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt? I anſwer;

All the Promiſes of God in Jeſus Chriſt are *Yea* and *Amen*, that is, moſt ſure and certain. But then you muſt alſo know, theſe Promiſes are conditional, and the performance of them on God's part, doth ſuppoſe certain Qualifications and Conditions on our part.

part. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,* 2 Cor. 7. 1. intimating, that unless we cleanse our selves from all filthiness, and do thus perfect Holiness, we have no title to these Promises.

Indeed Jesus Christ hath promised, *those that come unto him, he will in no wise cast them out*, but will kindly receive them, and treat them as Friends. But upon what terms he will receive them, and own them as Friends; he himself hath told us in these words. *Ye are my friends, if ye do what soever I command you*, John 15. 14. *And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him*, Heb. 5. 9.

I have now shewed you, that actual Holiness, or actual Obedience (which are one and the same thing) is the Gospel-condition of Salvation. And if you can make it appear, that a Man who in the time of his Health was so far from the practice of Religion,

that he contemned and deſpiſed it, nay, perhaps ridiculed and burleſqu'd it: If, I ſay, ſuch a Man when he is laid upon a Sick-bed, and is able to do nothing elſe, can obey the Laws of the Goſpel, and walk in the ways of God's Commandments, then indeed you ſay ſomething; otherwiſe here is, as yet, but very ſlender encouragement for a Death-bed Repentance But,

3. We ſuppoſe further, *That the dying Perſon makes very ſerious and paſſionate Reſolutions of amendment of Life. And will not the Mercy of God accept theſe Reſolutions? In ſuch a Caſe will not he take the Will for the Deed?*

To this I anſwer;

That when Men are in a great fright, and are under the apprehenſions of ſome eminent Danger, 'tis then the moſt common thing in the World to make Reſolutions. What will not ſuch Men promiſe, if they may but eſcape ſuch and ſuch a Danger! The Vows of Mariners and Seamen in a violent Storm, are a noted inſtance of ſuch Reſolutions. Let

Let us now ſtrictly examine, Whether, or how far, God will accept ſuch dying Reſolutions?

To ſtate this Matter truly, you muſt obſerve, That Religion is repreſented in the Goſpel as our reaſonable or rational Service, and conſequently that the exerciſe of it muſt proceed from Judgment and Deliberation, not from ſudden Heats and Paſſion. We are admoniſhed by the wiſe man, *Not to offer to God the ſacrifice of fools*; but when we make a vow or promiſe to him, deliberately to conſider how far, or in what manner we can be able to perform it.

Now there are *Two* Things to be conſider'd in a dying Sinner's Reſolution, *Sincerity* and *Ability*. Sincerity in his *Intentions*, and Ability in his *Executions*.

And *firſt*, it is not likely that a dying Sinner's *Intention* ſhould be ſincere; but that he may promiſe what he never intends to perform. Such a Wretch who hath ſo far corrupted his Morals, may by the juſt Judgment of God be depraved

depraved in his understanding, and may vainly imagine that God is such a one as himself. And because he observes that frail Men have been often cheated by him, and have really believed him, whilst he made Promises and Protestations of what he never intended; he is so foolish as to fancy, that an Omniscient God may be likewise thus imposed on. And therefore he will be as large and as passionate in his Promises of Reformation, as the most notorious Malefactor ever was in hopes of Pardon. Whereas should God restore him to his former Health and Vigour, he would then be as loose and profane, as *Lustful* and *Intemperate*, as *Envious* and *Malicious*, as *Covetous* and *Worldly*, as ever he was before. We should then quickly have him at his old Cant: *The charms of beauty and good Company are not to be resisted. God forgive me, I am so used to this swearing, I rap out an Oath before I think on't. And I am naturally so passionate, I see I cannot help it.* But *be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,* Gal. 6. 7. But

But suppose the dying Sinner were sincere, and did really intend that Reformation which is now so solemnly promised; let him sadly consider, how unlikely it is he should be able to perform all this.

For his Conviction, I must remind him;

There are *Two* things necessary to all great Undertakings. *Ability* and *Opportunity*.

1. As to *Ability*; How difficult, if not impossible, it is for a sick and dying Sinner to reform his Nature, if ever it hath been your own case, you your selves will be easily convinced. When a man is oppressed with pain, disturb'd with Visits, distracted with the Clamours of his dissatisfied Relations: Amidst all this noise and diversion, What can possibly be done? what Duties can be performed? Do but seriously think upon it, and your own Apprehensions will excuse my enlargement.

But supposing he had the greatest Capacity, pray, what time is now left him

him to perfect so vast a Work? Evil Habits which have been long in contracting, are not suddenly rooted out. When Lusts and Passions (by being often indulged) are grown rampant, they are not easily mortified. A thorough Reformation is a work of time, and must be done successively, and by degrees. This is fully intimated whilst we are admonished *to go on to perfection. And to grow in grace.*

But what can that man do who is now a dying? When the Sentence of Death is passed upon him, and his Physician hath given him over? To talk then of reforming his Life, when he now finds he can live no longer, is such an intolerable piece of weakness, as in any other instance would scarce be heard with patience.

Suppose a dying Father, who had ruined his Family by his Extravagant Courses, should thus comfort his dejected, impoverished Children;

Be of good chear, I am now resolved to be very frugal. I'll provide for you, and get you a good Estate.

Pray,

Pray, what could be replied in such a Case?

Alas, Sir, you're a dying. You cannot lift your head off the Pillow. You cannot live till the morning. And how should you get us an Estate? To tell them further, *Ay, but I resolve it, and I hope you believe me:*

Such Resolution would be but mean Satisfaction; and a very slender supply of all their Wants.

The Application is easy, and pray make it effectually to your selves. In short; Promises and Resolutions are not Performances. Nor were ever so accepted by God or Man. But you will say;

4. *He actually, thus far, performs his Promises and Resolutions, that he makes Restitution, and that in several Instances. Will not this be accepted as true Repentance?*

To this I Answer,

That as *Restitution* is a most necessary Duty, to which all injurious Offenders are strictly obliged; so it is the surest Expedient to satisfy the Conscience, and to convince both our selves

and others of the truth and ſincerity of our Repentance.

But upon a ſtrict inquiry it will appear, how difficult it is for a dying Perſon to make ſuch Reſtitution.

For his Conviction I muſt remind him: That the word *Reſtitution*, in its Latitude, denotes *Two* Things.

1. *The being reconciled to the Perſon whom we have offended.*

2. *The giving him Satisfaction and Reparation for the Damage hath been done him.*

To explain this further, we are to obſerve; That in Sins againſt the *Second* Table, there is not only an Act of Diſobedience towards God, but alſo of affront and injury againſt our Brother. And he who truly repents, in both theſe Inſtances will cancel and undo, and take away his Sin as far as poſſible.

Let us now examine, how far both theſe can be done by a dying Perſon.

1. The

1. The dying Sinner pretends to be reconciled to thoſe whom he hath offended. 'He declares, He is very ſor-'ry for the envy and hatred, the ran-'cour and malice he hath been guilty 'of; And aſſures his Neighbour he is 'now very real, and deſires that what 'is paſt, may be forgiven and forgotten 'mutually on both ſides. He is heartily 'troubled that he hath ever done him 'any wrong, and deſires *him* to forgive 'him; and withal aſſures him, that 'he himſelf doth now forgive *him* and 'all the World, as he expects to be for-'given for Chriſt's ſake.

All this is plauſible and ſeemingly pious. But let me thus expoſtulate with this dying Sinner.

You ſay, you are now ſorry for the Wrongs and Injuries you have done to ſuch and ſuch Perſons. Let me ask you this ſhort Queſtion:

Are you now able to affront them any longer? Is it in your power to do them further miſchief? Is not your Malice now bridled, is not your Rancour limited and reſtrained?

For

For your Conviction pray resolve me;

You say, you do now forgive. But were you thus ready to forgive in the days of your Health and Vigour? Did not you then, on all occasions, express your resentments to the utmost? Did not you then gratify your Spleen, and take the pleasure of Revenge when it lay in your power? What reason is there now to believe you, whilst you protest you do forgive him?

You say, you forgive him, because you do not hurt him. You do not hurt him, because you cannot.

Again, You say, you forgive him. But what hypocrisy is this, to pretend to forgive, when you have had your Revenge already, and that to the utmost, at least as far, as your own safety, and respect to the Laws would permit you to take it.

I'll explain this further to you, in this following Case.

An insulting *Mahometan* confines his poor innocent *Christian* Slave in a noysome Dungeon, where with bad Air, and

and worſe uſage, the poor Man's heart is broke. And being told, that he is dying, he pretends to be merciful, and gives order for his releaſe. But what a cheat is this, to ſay he doth releaſe him, when he can keep him no longer? God hath releaſed him. For in the Grave, *the weary be at reſt.* There *the priſoners reſt together, they hear not the voice of the oppreſſor,* Job 3. 17, 18.

By the light of this Example you will eaſily underſtand the value and acceptance of a Death bed forgiveneſs.

And juſt at the ſame rate,

2. The dying Sinner makes Reparation and Satisfaction.

'He is convinced that he hath injured ſuch a Man, having wronged him in his Dealings to ſuch a value; And is now not only ſorry for the injury, but is alſo ready to make him ſatisfaction. *And is not this ſufficient evidence of the ſincerity of his Repentance?*

Anſwer;

It is indeed very pleaſing to God, that thoſe who have been wronged by you, ſhould receive ſatisfaction for the

Wrongs

Wrongs you have done them. And if this Reparation is not made by you in Perſon, it muſt then be made by your Heirs in Reverſion. But withal you muſt be reminded; that tho' what is paid and ſatisfied by your Heirs, may in the ſenſe of the Law be called your payment; yet I much queſtion, whether in the ſight of God it will be ſo accepted.

For to ſtate the Caſe fairly.

You are now ready to part with your Eſtate, and to diſtribute it in proportion to thoſe you have wronged. But, pray, who thanks you for this, To bequeath your Eſtate when you can keep it no longer? *Thou fool, this night thy ſoul ſhall be required of thee: then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be which thou haſt provided?* Luke 12. 20. that is, they are then none of thine. So that Satisfaction in Reverſion is not thine, but thy Heirs. And he who thus makes Reſtitution, he only pays his old Scores, by drawing a Bill upon his Executors.

I have

I have now distinctly examin'd what it is that a dying Sinner can be able to perform in order to Repentance. As also, what small hope there is, that such kind of Repentance should be accepted by a pure and holy God.

A man may remember his Sins; He may be sorry for his Sins; He may confess his Sins; He may beg Pardon for his Sins, with firm Resolutions of Amendment; nay, He may make actual Restitution to those he hath wrong'd, and yet may be rejected.

But you will say,

This is very harsh and uncomfortable Doctrine; and we can scarce think that you your self will be so severe and ill-natur'd, as to practise accordingly. When you visit Sick-Beds, and hear a poor Dying Creature to lament his Sins with Tears, and most earnestly beg Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ: When you observe how passionately he resolves, *That if God will but spare him, he'll become a new man, and never more be guilty of such extravagance:*

What

What do you ſay or do in ſuch a Caſe? Nay, what muſt ſuch a wicked man do, who having lived a vicious Life, ſhall thus happen to be ſurpriſed by Death?

Dare you be ſo uncharitable as to paſs the Decree upon him, and ſay, *That he is paſt hope: There's no remedy, but he is certainly damned?*

Anſwer;

I dare not preſume to limit the *Holy One*, whoſe Mercies are Infinite. In ſuch a Caſe I will not cenſure, but admoniſh and inſtruct. I will exhort the dying Sinner to remember his Sins; to bewail his Sins; to beg Pardon for his Sins; to make firm Reſolutions of Amendment; and where there is occaſion, to make Reſtitution. And having prayed earneſtly for him, and commended him to God's Mercy, *Do I then ſay, Such a one ſhall be damned? No; I dare not. But do I ſay he ſhall be ſaved? No; I cannot.* What then do I reſolve? What do I determine in this matter? I will be ſilent, and determine nothing. For as I dare not

flatter

flatter him into a falſe and groundleſs Preſumption, ſo neither would I ſink him into the horror of Deſpair. I ſay, I will determine nothing; *I will judge nothing before the time.* All that I can do, in this dark, intricate Caſe, is to 'commend him to the *Extraordinary Mer-* 'cy of God, to which we muſt leave 'ſome great Caſes, not knowing what to 'judge of them our ſelves. Poſſibly, God, 'who will have mercy on whom he 'will have mercy, may pleaſe to let this 'Dying Sinner be a ſignal Example of his 'Unlimited Power and Prerogative, to 'ſave beyond all ordinary Rules.

Whether it may be *thus*, or *thus*, I dare not determine. What God can do, *ex plenitudine Poteſtatis*, or by his Prerogative, is not for us to diſpute. However, I muſt be ſo faithful to my Office, as to admoniſh this dying Sinner, That the Goſpel, by the Laws of which we muſt be judged, doth expreſly declare, *That actual Holineſs, and actual Obedience, are the neceſſary Conditions of Salvation.* When therefore a man hath been vicious and extravagant

travagant all his Life long, if God doth accept his Dying Resolutions, 'tis more than he hath Promised: And 'tis more than he hath given us Authority to Preach and Declare.

But are we not told in the Gospel, *That the Labourers were rewarded who came into the Vineyard at the Eleventh Hour?* And that *the Thief upon the Cross was received into Paradise?* And are not these *Two* Examples sufficient for a Death-bed Repentance?

I Answer:

'Tis very deplorable, what slight, trifling Pretences, what thin, fig-leaf Excuses some men will make for the neglect of their Duty. As, in particular, may appear by a strict Examination of these *Two* Instances.

I. *Of the Labourers in the Vineyard.*

THIS being a Parable, is to be interpreted as all other Parables ought to be.

Tis a Rule among the Schoolmen, *Theologia Symbolica non eſt Argumentativa*; that is, Arguments are not to be drawn from the particular Circumſtances of Parables, but only from the chief Scope and Deſign of them.

Now when you have obſerved the Scope and Deſign of this Parable, (which you read, *Matth.* 20.) you will then eaſily be convinced, what ſlender encouragement it gives for a Death-bed Repentance.

The Story is this:

'A Maſter of a Family hires a Com-'pany of Workmen to dig in his Vine-'yard. Some he hires early in the 'Morning, and bargains to give them 'a *Penny a day* for their Labour. About 'the *Third* hour, (which anſwers to 'our *Nine* in the Morning) as alſo at 'the *Sixth* hour, (which is our *Twelve*

'at Noon) and at the *Ninth* hour, '(which is our *Three* in the Afternoon) 'he hires more Labourers with this 'condition, *Whatsoever is right, I will 'give you*, that is, I will not bind my 'self to give you the Wages of a whole 'Day for working part of it; but ac- 'cording as you behave your selves, I 'will reward you.

'At the *Eleventh* hour (which is 'about our *Five* in the Evening) he 'takes *in* more Workmen upon the same 'terms. And at Night he gives them 'their Wages, and pays them all alike. 'And tho' some of them were discon- 'tented at this sort of Distribution, 'and thought it unequal, that those 'who had workt but one single hour, 'should be paid as largely as they, who 'had swear for it all the Day; yet they 'were quickly silenced by being told, '*Friend, I do thee no wrong*, that is, they 'had their Bargain. And what reason 'had they to envy and murmur, if 'either to encourage Industry, or to 'express his own Bounty, he had given 'to these *last*, as unto them who were '*first*? This

This is the Parable. The Interpretation of which, the meaneſt Capacity will thus eaſily comprehend.

Almighty God, the great Houſholder, calls ſeveral Labourers, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, into his Vineyard, the Church. At ſeveral hours of the Day, that is, in different Ages of the World, and at ſeveral times of mens Lives. Thoſe who came in at the *Eleventh* hour, that is, in the declining part of their Lives, they had their reward of Glory, as well as thoſe who came in at the firſt.

From which Parable ſome Perſons have made this Inference.

That tho' a Man may have loiter'd all the Day, and waſted the time of his Life in Sin and Vanity, yet if he comes *in* at the *Eleventh* hour, that *is*, if he Repents, and is ſorry for his Sin at his Death, God will then both accept and reward him.

But this is a very groſs and fatal miſtake, and it is the greateſt Charity to make Men ſenſible of it.

Now in order to such Mens Conviction, I shall desire them to consider,

1. They who came in at the *Eleventh* hour, they came in and work'd as soon as they were called. Had they been called sooner, they would have work'd sooner. Had they been called at the *Ninth* hour, they would have work'd from the *Ninth* hour. Had they been called at the *Sixth* hour, they would have work'd from the *Sixth* hour. Had they been called early in the Morning, they would have work'd from that time. This being the very reason they gave for their Idleness, *viz. No man hath hired us.*

But what is this to the Case of a dying Sinner now under the Gospel? Who was called upon, and invited to work, not only at the *Eleventh* hour, or at the *Ninth* hour, or at the *Sixth* hour, but early in the Morning, even in the very beginning of his Life; from his Childhood, in the dawning of the Day, he was called to this State of Salvation. But he obstinately refused

refuſed to work, and reſiſted the many Calls and Invitations of God, and ſlighted the Warnings and Admonitions of his Miniſters. He waſted his Time, and ſquander'd his Days in Idleneſs and Luxury; and being now come to the period of his Life, he only begs pardon for not working. I ſay, What pretence of comfort can he frame from this Parable, that God will reward him only for *Wiſhings* and *Wouldings* at the laſt Gaſp? But,

2. Thoſe Labourers who came into the Vineyard at the *Eleventh* hour, tho' indeed they came *in* late, yet they work'd *one* hour, and they continued labouring to the cloſe of the Day. But had they ſtaid to the *Twelfth* hour, when working was over, and ſhould thus make their Confeſſion to the Steward: *Sir, 'tis true, you hired us in the Morning, and we promiſed you to come and work. But ſo it happens, we have been idling, and loitering, and diverting our ſelves all the Day. However we are now ſorry for it, and hope you will*

pass it by, and give us our Wages amongst the rest.

Pray, what answer would he make to such Men as these?

This is the very Case of a Death-bed Repentance. For the dying Sinner doth not so much as come *in* at the *Eleventh* hour, but stays till the *Twelfth*; till *Night cometh, when no man can work.* He hath been trifling and loitering, revelling and caressing all the time of his Life; and now expects at his Death that God should reward him, because the Labourers in the Vineyard, who came not in till the *Eleventh* hour, did receive their Wages equal with the first. But, I say, how great a cheat he puts upon himself in this comparison, will easily appear from these premises to any considering Person.

'Tis true, Those who came in at the *Eleventh* hour they had their Wages, for they did work *one* hour. But what then? *Therefore* those shall be rewarded who did not work at all. This is indeed the noted Logick of a dying Sinner,

Sinner. But the Inference is too trifling to deserve a Confutation.

The *Second* Instance commonly urged in favour of a *Death-bed Repentance*, is

The Thief upon the Cross.

YOU read his Story, *Luke* 23. from *Verse* 39. 'Our Blessed Saviour being crucified between *two* 'Thieves, *One of them railed on him,* 'saying, *If thou be Christ, save thy self* 'and *us.* As if he had said, If thou 'art what thou pretendest to be, a 'Christ, a *Saviour*, if thou art not a 'Cheat and Impostor, *save thy self and* 'us. *But the other answering, rebuked* 'him, saying, *Dost not thou fear God,* 'seeing thou art in the same Condemnation? *And we indeed justly*, that is, we 'were justly condemned, and we justly now suffer the Sentence of our 'Condemnation. *For we receive the* 'due reward of our Deeds; but this Man 'hath done nothing amiss, that is, he is 'an Innocent Person whom the *Jews*

'and *Romans* do thus barbarously Mur-
'ther. *And he said unto Jesus, Lord,*
'*remember me when thou comest into thy*
'*kingdom.* As if he had said, Tho'
'these contemn and revile thee as
'mean and despicable, yet I acknow-
'ledge thee to be a Great Lord, and
'that thou hast a Kingdom to dis-
'pose on. *And Jesus said unto him,*
'*Verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt*
'*thou be with me in paradise*; that is,
'immediately after thy Death thou
'shalt go to a place of Happiness,
'and there abide with me, as a Mem-
'ber of that my Kingdom which thou
'now askest for.

This is the Story of the Thief upon the Cross.

From whose Example, Carnal, Li-centious Persons do thus encourage themselves in their extravagant Pra-ctices.

'We are fully convinced of the ne-
'cessity of Repentance. And we do
'as fully resolve, some time or other,
'to Repent. But why should we be
'so forward to disturb our Pleasures,

and

'and neglect our Buſineſs as to do it 'now, ſince we may Repent hereafter 'at better leiſure? And tho' we ſhould 'be ſo far diverted, as not to Repent 'till our Death, yet we have here an 'encouraging Example, we ſhall then 'be accepted. This Thief had been 'very notorious and extravagant, an 'Offender of the firſt Rate; and yet 'when he calls for Mercy, tho' it was 'with his laſt Breath, his, *Lord, re-* 'member me when thou comeſt into thy 'Kingdom, was comfortably anſwered 'with a *This day thou ſhalt be with me* 'in paradiſe. And therefore, tho' the 'greateſt part of our Lives, like this 'Thief's, may have been ſpent in Sin 'and Vanity, yet if we can but ſay, '*Lord have mercy upon us*, with our 'laſt Breath, we ſhall likewiſe be ac- 'cepted.

To this I

Anſwer:

THIS a dangerous thing to preſume on God's Mercy. And ſo provoking is ſuch Preſumption, that if the bare ſaying of theſe words, *Lord*

have mercy upon me, would save thy Soul; it may so happen, through the just Judgment of God, thou mayst not be able to do it.

Thou mayst dye suddenly, or thou mayst dye Stupid, or raving-mad.

But suppose thou hast both Breath, and the use of thy Reason to say these words, here is very slender encouragement from the Example of this Thief, that a dying Sinner, who never repented till his Death, shall then find Mercy.

For to prove the Validity of a *Death-bed Repentance*, from the Example of this Thief, *Two* things are supposed.

1. *That this Thief was a very wicked Man.*
2. *That he continued in his Sin, and did not repent till the time of his Death.*

Now, if neither of these *Two* can be proved, then the Case of this Thief is not parallel, nor a firm foundation for the Validity of a *Death-bed* Repentance.

1. It

1. It doth not appear, *That this Thief was a very wicked Man.*

He is called indeed a Thief, and dies as a Malefactor. But now, a good Man, and who is so in the general Course of his Life, may by surprise, and the violence of a Temptation, be guilty of a very bad Action, of which he afterwards doth sincerely Repent. The very Case of *David* and *Peter*. But further, he is called indeed a *Thief* in our Translation; λῃστὴς in the *Greek*, *Latro* in the *Latin*. But what these words do properly signify, we must further examine.

It was the Character of *Barabbas*, that he was λῃστὴς, a *Robber*. So we Translate it, *John* 18. 40. But what kind of Person he was, may be infer'd from other places of Scripture.

It is said of this *Barabbas*, That *for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murther, he was cast into prison*, Luke 23. 19. And St. *Mark* tells us, Chap. 15. Ver. 7. *There was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them, who had made insurrection with him*, that is, at his Instigation

ſtigation and Procurement. He was, it's probable, the Ringleader and Captain of the Rebels. The which conjecture is further confirm'd by the ſtory of this *Barabbas* in St. Matth. 27. 16. *They* (that is, the *Jews*) *had then a notable priſoner called Barabbas*; Δέσμιον ἐπίσημον. Now the word ἐπίσημος, ſignifies *an Eminent Perſon, a Man of Note and Quality.*

This *Barabbas* then was the Head of the Party. Who as Zealots for their Nation and Religion, had made a riſing againſt the *Romans*; in which attempt being unſucceſsful, they were puniſhed as Malefactors. And yet this *Barabbas*, tho' the Captain-General of a Party, is called, λῃστὴς, *Latro*, a *Thief.*

And in Confirmation of this, I muſt further obſerve to you, That the word *Latro*, which is now a term of Ignominy and Reproach, and is uſually tranſlated, a Thief, or a Robber; did anciently ſignify no more, as the beſt Authors inform us, than a *hired Souldier.* And *Latrocinari* pro *Militare*,

Militare, is noted Language in *Plautus*.

So that this penitent Thief, as great a Malefactor as he is usually supposed, was no worse (for ought we know to the contrary) than a Souldier, who hapning to be on the wrong side, was punished as a Malefactor.

But now supposing,

2. That this Thief had been a very wicked Man; (which is more than was ever yet proved against him) yet, *How do we know that he did not Repent, even long before he died?* And if so, if he had formerly repented, then his Case is nothing to the purpose, nor can his Example, with any shew of reason be urged in favour of a Death-bed Repentance.

But supposing,

3. That this Thief was, 1. *A very wicked Man*, not a Souldier, as the word may be render'd, but a *Thief*, and a *Robber*, in the strictest Sense. And supposing, 2. *That he did not Repent till his Death.* Yet I shall shew, *ex abundanti*, that his Example ought not to be

be urged in favour of a Death-bed Repentance. As will more fully appear by examining the Circumstances of this Thief's Conversion.

1. 'Tis possible he never heard of Christ till his Crucifixion.

If he was a *Gentile*, and not a *Jew*, 'tis highly probable he never did. For Christ, at first, *was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. And the Commission, *Go, teach all Nations*, was not enlarged till the day of his Ascention. If this was his Case, *How could he believe on him, of whom he had not heard?* So that on this Supposition, no other than a Death-Repentance was possible to this Thief.

2. Supposing he had heard of Christ, and that he was informed by common Fame, that there was a Man called *Jesus*, who had done great Miracles: And that several had this opinion of him, That he was the *Messias*, whom God had promised to send into the World: Yet all this was but general and confused knowledge.

He

He had indeed heard of Christ, and the several Passages concerning him. But such was the Course of Life this Thief is supposed to have led, that he had no great curiosity to inquire over-strictly into such matters. But when it so hapned that he was apprehended for Robbery, and condemned to dye at the same time with Christ; this in all probability made him curious to inquire after him, and to learn all the Circumstances of his Apprehension, Tryal, and Behaviour. From whence he observed so much as convinced him, that he was the true *Messias*. And so he believed on him, and had Salvation by him.

But what encouragement is this to thee, O presuming Christian! who was baptized into Christ, and distinctly instructed in the Doctrine of the Gospel, even from thy Childhood?

Had this Thief, as thou art, been early admitted into the Church; had he then been instructed in his Duty, and

and constantly admonished to continue in it: And if after such Admission, such Instructions and Exhortations, had he still lived upon the Pad, and spent his time in Roving and Robbing, in Luxury and Injustice; and had rejected the Warnings and Admonitions of his Teachers. Had this been his Case, we have then the justest reason to pronounce, That a short Ejaculation at his Death would not have been accepted; and his *Lord remember me*, would have been rejected with a *Depart from me, I know thee not, thou worker of Iniquity.* But,

3. *The Case of this Thief was miraculous and extraordinary.* And that whether we consider the Penitent, or the Grace of God in pardoning.

1. As to the Thief; probably he had lived in great Ignorance, and never had the means of Grace till now. And therefore to profess his Faith in Christ, when he saw him hanging upon

on the Croſs, was very ſignal and extraordinary.

He confeſſed Chriſt when his own Diſciples fled from him, and when *Peter* himſelf denied him. Nay, ſo great was the Scandal of the Croſs, that all Men then forſook him, and loſt their Faith in him, and had no further hope of Help and Salvation from him.

Now to confeſs and own him at ſuch a time as this, was ſo pleaſing and acceptable to our Saviour, that he makes him a ſignal Inſtance of his Grace and Favour.

2. It was very agreeable to the Divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs, to do ſomething extraordinary on ſuch a ſolemn Occaſion as this. Thereby to ſignalize the Efficacy of our Saviour's Mediatorſhip, and that at ſuch a time, when the Dignity and Glory of his Perſon was moſt clouded and obſcured.

From theſe Premiſes it appears, That this Inſtance of the Thief upon the Croſs, was miraculous and extraordinary.

ordinary. And we have a known Rule, *Extraordinaria non debent esse Exempla*, Extraordinary Cases are no Rule for practice.

The *Israelites* had Manna showred down from Heaven. Will you therefore leave your Husbandry, and expect your Bread from the Clouds?

Will you adventure to leap into the Sea, because you read that *Jonah* was saved from thence? Look upon this Thief as a *Jonah* in the Sea; A Miracle of Grace; a Prodigy of Providence.

A King in his Progress passing by the Place of Execution, as an Instance of his Royal Favour, pardons a Thief with the Rope about his Neck; Dare you therefore be encouraged to play the Thief, in hopes of such a strange and unusual Pardon?

And if you dare not thus venture your Life, your Temporal Concern; dare you hazard your Soul, your Eternal Concern?

To conclude.

Our Bleſſed Saviour in pardoning this Thief, in ſuch an extraordinary manner, hath ſhewed us what he *can do*, that none may Deſpair. But he hath likewiſe declared in his Holy Word what he ordinarily *will* do, that none may preſume. He hath plainly told us, *That without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*, Heb. 12. 14. And *that every one ſhall receive the things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*, 2 Cor. 5. 10.

The CLOSE.

I Have now faithfully repreſented the Uncertainty and Danger of a *Death-bed Repentance*. And have plainly admoniſhed you, That if you neglect to Repent *now*, and defer this neceſſary Work to you know not *when* hereafter, you have juſt Cauſe to

to fear you will *never Repent*. For either you may be prevented by a ſudden ſtroke, and ſo your Repentance is impoſſible; or elſe diſturbed with the Pains and Tortures of a languiſhing Bed. Which indeed may diſtract you with Remorſe and Anguiſh, with Horror and Deſpair; but it is much to be feared without true Repentance.

I do much hope (and do earneſtly pray) that what I have now ſaid on this Subject, may make its due Impreſſion upon you. But the more effectually to perſuade you, give me leave to enforce my Admonitions, with the noted words of a truly *Great* and *Good Man*, now with God.

'LET no Man deceive you with vain Words, or with falſe Notions of a ſlight and ſudden Repentance. Do not delude your ſelves with vain hopes, that this Work may be done at any time, and in an inſtant; and that if you can but faſhion your laſt breath into *Lord have mercy*

'*mercy upon me*, this will prevail with 'God, and make Atonement for the 'long Course of a wicked and sinful 'Life.

'What strange thoughts have Men 'of God and Heaven? As if Heaven 'were an *Hospital*, founded on pur-'pose to receive all sick and maimed 'Persons; that when they can live 'no longer to the Lusts of the Flesh, 'and sinful Pleasures of this World, 'can but put up a cold and formal 'Petition to be admitted there.

'No, no, as sure as God is true, 'they shall never see the Kingdom of 'God, who instead of seeking it in 'the first place, make it their last Re-'fuge and Retreat. And when they 'find themselves under the Sentence 'of Death and Damnation, only to 'avoid present Execution, and since 'there is no other remedy, do at last 'bethink themselves of getting to '*Heaven*, and fall upon their Knees, 'to Petition the *Great Judge of the* '*World*, that they may be *transported* 'thither.

'Can

'Can any Man in reason expect 'that such a Petition will be granted? 'I tell you nay; *but except you repent* 'sooner, and at a fitter time, and after 'a better fashion, *you shall certainly* 'perish.' As much as God desires the Salvation of Men, he will not prostitute *Heaven*, and set the Gates of it 'wide open to those, who only fly to 'it in extremity, but never sought it 'in good earnest, nor indeed do now 'care for it, or desire it for any other 'reason, but to excuse them from 'going to *Hell*. They have no value 'for *Heaven*, because they are in no 'wise fit for it. But yet they think '*Hell* to be the worse place of the 'two.

'I am afraid this is the true Interpretation of many a Man's Repentance, who hath deferr'd it till he 'comes to dye. I do not speak this to 'discourage Repentance even at that 'time. I deny not the possibility of 'the thing. But to speak the best of 'it, it is a very dangerous Remedy. 'For, alas, how unfit are most Men

'at

'at such a time for so great and seri-
'ous a Work as Repentance is, when
'they are unfit for the smallest matter,
'and how hard is it for any Man then
'to be assured of the truth and reality
'of his Repentance, when there is no
'sufficient opportunity to make trial
'of the sincerity of it? I desire to have
'as large apprehensions of the Mercy
'of God as any man. But withal, I
'am very sure that he is the hardest to
'be imposed upon, of any one in the
'World. And no Man that hath any
'worthy apprehensions of the Deity,
'can imagine him to be so easy, as to
'forgive Men upon the last Word and
'Intimation of their Minds; and to
'have such a fondness for Offenders,
'as would reflect upon the Prudence
'of any Magistrate and Governor up-
'on Earth.

'*God grant that I may sincerely endea-*
'*vour to live a Holy and Virtuous Life;*
'*and may have the comfort of that when*
'*I come to die. And that I may never be*
'so

'*ſo unwiſe, as to venture all my hopes of* '*a bleſſed Eternity upon a Death-bed Re-* '*pentance.*

Vid. Archbiſhop *Tillotſon*'s Ser. on *Eccleſ.* 12. 1. and Ser. on *Heb.* 3. 13.

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